

**{as prepared for delivery}**

**Thomas C. Dorr  
Under Secretary for Rural Development  
Remarks**

**National Rural Development Partnership Conference  
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- **Thank you for that kind introduction. It is both a pleasure and a privilege for me to meet with you again today.**
- **Your leadership on behalf of rural America is what will help to determine the long term viability of our rural communities, vast lands and resources. And this leadership demands even greater coordination and cooperation amongst Federal, state, local governments and private and public organizations.**

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

- **Yes, rural America faces significant challenges.**

- **There are sweeping changes in the global economy, in the farm economy, especially the rural economy. Standing still isn't an option. It never has been. It certainly isn't now.**
- **In addition to the challenges, there are new opportunities – significant new opportunities. They vary, of course, from community to community, sector to sector and region to region. Rural America is an incredibly diverse and dynamic place.**
- **But as one looks back on a half century of astonishing change, and then looks ahead, I'm driven to remark -- as Ronald Reagan used to say – “You ain't seen nothing yet.” And we haven't.**

- **As you've heard me say in the past – there were two major events – fall of the iron curtain and the invention of the internet.**
- **The internet and accompanying bandwidth will open vistas unimaginable just a few years ago, let alone to earlier generations.**

**This is revolutionary. It is transforming how we live, where we live, where and how we work. The old barriers of time, distance, and rural isolation are crumbling.**

**Our job is to turn this unprecedented new freedom into a competitive advantage for rural communities. And we can.**

- **I see two distinctive opportunities for rural America:**
  - **Renewable Energy**

- **Place – just visited Plains, MT**

**... Through investment in broadband and other key infrastructure, through better educational opportunities, through leadership development and technical assistance, through leveraged investment in strategic sectors ...**

**... Our job is to help rural communities step up to that bigger, more competitive world, and succeed – to facilitate the ability to live locally and compete globally.**

- **We are seeing ethanol, biodiesel, and renewables reach the breakout stage.**
- **This isn't 1965-1978 and ethanol isn't an ADM story any more. Some in the press haven't gotten the word, but they will be getting an education soon.**

- **The renewable fuel standard in the energy bill is a big boost, but underlying that are relentlessly rising global oil prices, increasing environmental pressures, and market driven advances in production efficiencies.**
- **Our job is to ensure that rural businesses, cooperatives, and rural communities have access to the technical assistance and investment capital they need to lead this transition and profit from the evolution in our resource base – to keep these profits in their communities.**
- **The list goes on and on. In the course of one lifetime, agriculture has moved from plowing behind a mule to gene splicing, and small towns have moved from localized farm service centers to fully integrated players in national and global networks.**

- **It is anyone's guess what historians a hundred years from now will deem the biggest change agent of our time. I believe the freeing of political minds.**
- **But for those of us who choose to live and work in rural America -- for those of us who value the traditions and lifestyles of rural communities -- there is a great future upon which to build.**

#### **MISSION/PRESIDENT'S AGENDA**

- **That's why I am excited to be here today on behalf of a President and Administration that have a future-oriented vision for rural America and for all America.**
- **That vision is pro-active, inclusive, and far-reaching.**

- **It understands, as I said before, that standing still is not an option.**
- **It recognizes the drivers of change. It recognizes that change works to the advantage of those who get ahead of the curve. It recognizes that the future lies in harnessing change, not in the politics of delay denial on the status quo.**
- **It includes as a top priority the ownership society. That means encouraging homeownership to strengthen families and build communities, encouraging business development, and unleashing the infinite creativity of entrepreneurship.**
- **It includes access to broadband, critical health care, affordable housing and traditional infrastructure.**

- **It includes renewable energy, ethanol, and emerging opportunities in bioagriculture.**
- **And it is predicated on full inclusion -- on active outreach to formerly underserved groups and reducing barriers to access. This has been a major commitment of Rural Development since 2001, and it will continue to be in the years ahead.**
- **The President's agenda includes all of these things, and more. That means a full plate for us. We have a challenge ... and that's to lead.**

## **LEADERSHIP PLEDGE**



- **I am personally committed to ensuring that USDA Rural Development rises to that challenge in participation with our federal, state, and local partners.**
- **On the issues I've mentioned – and many others -- our job is to help rural America marshal the vision and courage to identify and use the financial resources, the technical support, the community leadership, and the entrepreneurial spirit it already possesses as well as needs to meet the challenges of today, and tomorrow.**
- **It's a big job. I recognize that we can't and shouldn't do it alone. And I'm glad you're here to help.**

## **PARTNERSHIPS/RECOGNITION OF NRDP**

- We also need partners in the private sector, community leaders, nonprofits and other government agencies -- and the NRDP.
- We have to be a team.
- We have different roles, and we may sometimes have different perspectives ... we wouldn't be human if we didn't ...
- ... But I know that every person in this room shares a deep and abiding commitment to rural America ... a progressive vision for the future of rural America ... and a passion for making it happen.
- I recently engaged a conversation with other Federal Departments on how we can help you and your communities

**with the opportunities and meet the challenges through coordination of resources. I was very encouraged by the dialogue we had, and I hope that was reflected in the roundtable discussion earlier this morning. There is a true sense of enthusiasm for working together to bring more resources to bear. But we believe that it is best directed at the state and local level, not in Washington.**

- I sat down with Secretary Johanns recently to talk about how we work to structure this network of resources and I can assure you that he is fully committed to developing a strong partnership amongst all of the various partners.**
- That is where you and your partners, along with those yet to be identified, will be critical as we move forward to meet the challenges and opportunities in rural America. So I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank YOU for everything you have done -- and everything you are continuing to do for the 60 plus million rural residents.**

## **PARTNERSHIP INVESTING IN RURAL AMERICA**

- **I'd like to speak for a moment more about partnerships -- specifically, the business end of partnerships -- because that can be a tricky business.**
- **Partnerships are two way streets.**
- **USDA Rural Development has been given the charge of leading rural development efforts in America. It is a tremendous responsibility, but one that we enthusiastically carrying out everyday.... And it is evident when you look at the size of our portfolio of investments in rural America.**

- **We're a venture capital entity for rural America with a investments annually of \$13-14 billion. That's a significant increase from just five or six years ago.**
- **We build hospitals and schools. We fund ethanol plants and day care centers. We're pushing broadband into rural areas, supporting value added ventures, helping diversify rural economies and creating jobs through our business programs.**
- **You've probably heard the numbers before. Since 2001, we've invested \$3.4 billion in broadband and connected 1.3 million rural businesses and homeowners. We've invested over \$190 million in bioenergy and biomass. We've assisted nearly 3,000 schools and over 1,100 rural hospitals and clinics. We've invested \$4.4 billion in value-added, Business and Industry, and other business development programs.**

- **But in every one of these areas, we are critically dependent on our partners to make them work.**
- **That's our goal.**
- **That said, I recognize that funding is a sensitive issue -- not just for NRDP, but for many of the other rural stakeholders with whom we have longstanding and complex relationships as well.**

## **NRDCC**

- **It is important to recognize that the creation of the National Rural Development Coordinating Committee (NRDCC) is two-prong. It has to be authorized, and it has to receive appropriations. We know the first prong came from the 2002 Farm Bill, but the second has not materialized. Yet we haven't stood still, nor will we in the future.**

- **We are stewards of the public's money, servants of the public interest, and committed to advancing the President's agenda for rural America.**
- **We are going to lead.**
- **To broaden this effort, I've instructed our State Directors to begin convening regular meetings of the stakeholder groups in each of their States. Some states are already doing this. All of them will do it in the future.**
- **I want to personally invite YOU to participate in this initiative. You have a key role to play, we want your input, and we want your leadership skills at the table.**
- **Let me be clear --**

- **Our purpose in this new initiative is not to usurp anyone else's role or poach anyone else's programs. Goodness knows, we have enough to do to manage our own.**
- **Our purpose is to convene a meeting of peers, acting independently, to facilitate communication and coordination. The need for this is apparent to all of us. You see it every day. So do I.**
  - **Rural communities -- towns of 1,500 or counties of 15,000 -- DON'T have staff experts pouring over the Federal Register each morning.**
  - **They DON'T have in-house professional economic development staffs.**



- **They DON'T have a bunch of people with Ph.D's in grant-writing and armies of intergovernmental liaison specialists.**
- **They DON'T have unlimited time to navigate paperwork mazes or untangle overlapping agency demands.**

**That means rural communities DO desperately need the kind of assistance we can provide:**

- **The kind of assistance YOU can provide at the State level through the SRDC's,**
- **And the kind of technical assistance that WE can provide through our 800 State and local offices.**

- **So today, I am volunteering our time and staff to get the ball rolling toward better coordination in those States where this is not already happening.**
- **If others want to step in and share that role, that's great. If you want to take it on, that's great. We'll support you.**
- **From preliminary discussions I referenced earlier, your Federal partners are enthusiastic about participating.**
- **I hope you will be, too.**

## **CONCLUSION**

- **I'm proud of what Rural Development has accomplished in the last 5 years. I'm excited about what we are doing today.**
- **The most powerful force in the world is human ingenuity and creativity. If we can unlock that by providing infrastructure, investment capital, technical support, and leadership, the future is bright indeed.**
- **Thank you.**